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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



Winter 1992

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE ...PRIDE

For farm people, pride is their underpinning; their self-esteem. Every day, year after year, they benefit from seeing and experiencing the results of their efforts, skills, and performances.

Farm people are special, and sadly the number of farms is declining. Back in the mid-1950's, there were over 4 million farms in the United States. Today, some 35 years later, there are about 2 million farms. What will the number be in 2025? Some people think the number of farms will be under 1 million.

In the 1990's, successful rural entrepreneurs continue and new ones are being established. However, entrepreneurship is not without problems and efforts such as resources, market risks, and uncertainties.

The transformations in agriculture over the past decades have forced many farmers to adapt in order to keep solvent or at least ahead of their banker. Many times I have asked myself these questions, "Why do they farm?" and "What is it going to take to be a successful small or part-time farmer in the future?" Pride was the key word that always came to mind. In addition, there were several more words, all beginning with the letter P. I call this litany of words the 10 "P's" of successful small and part-time farming. They are:

- Pleasure, to individual and family.
- Profit, from business activity.
- Potential, for growth and development.
- Perpetuation, of family assets and resources.
- Prioritizing values to increase effectiveness.
- People, centered in frame of reference for production, finance, and marketing.
- Perseverance, for survival during the lows.
- Perfectionism, but open to new ideas, changes, and improvements over time.

- Periscope Vision (360° view), to watch the economy and environment around you.
- Pride, because people benefit from seeing and experiencing the results of their efforts, skills, and performances.

As you and other farm families evaluate your prospects for the years ahead, these 10 "P's" take on increased meaning for discussions of agricultural production, marketing, financial systems, and family values.

Today, there is rising public concern over the increase in pollution, population pressures, commercial and residential development in formerly prime agricultural areas, and the decline in agricultural vocations. In particular, the small family farm is under severe attack from a complexity of adversarial forces. And yet, some small family farms manage to survive. Farm families are working additional jobs and investing their income to ensure the survival of an irreplaceable quality of life and values. Why do small farmers continue this struggle against increasingly insurmountable odds? Is the success of their struggle critical to America's future and to the world? With pride, my answer is "yes." (Comments of Howard W. (Bud) Kerr, Jr. USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture, November 1991)

Important - The USDA publication Small-Scale Agriculture Today must always be a busy two-way street. Your inputs are OSSA news, and vice versa, OSSA inputs are your news. Please send your topics, technologies, and calendar events to OSSA, USDA-CSRS, Suite 342, Aerospace Building, Washington, DC 20250-2200; telephone 202-401-4640, Fax 202-401-5179.

Topics and Technology

Brambles - This is the latest factsheet of the series "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative" from the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. Free, the publication lists several sources of information on i.e. cultural practice, marketing, pest control, etc. Contact: Bud Kerr, USDA-CSRS, OSSA, Suite 342, Aerospace Building, Washington, DC 20250-2200; telephone 202-401-4640, Fax 202-401-5179.

Proceedings - A collection of more than 60 papers (249 pages) (Proceedings 1991 Illinois Specialty Growers Convention,) is available for \$15 (check payable to University of Illinois). Contact: Jeff Kindhart, University of Illinois, Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, Route 1, Simpson, IL 62985; telephone 618-695-2444.

Question - Cotton, flax, and hemp plants all produce two useful products. Fiber is one. Can you name the other? Answer is somewhere in this newsletter.

"Florida's Alfalfa" - It is a peanut (*Arachis glabrata* Benth.) A legume that lives from year to year yet doesn't produce edible nuts. However, it does produce a high-quality forage, which is hard to find in Florida and in many other Southern States. Contact: E.C. French or G.M. Prine, University of Florida, Agronomy Dept., 304 Newell Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611; telephone 904-392-1811, Fax 904-392-1840.

Handbook - Small-scale growers whose taste runs to the exotic have a new resource at their fingertips -- Specialty and Minor Crops Handbook, #3346. The 144-page handbook costs \$30 (check payable to the University of California Regents). Contact: Small Farm Center, University of California, Davis, CA 95616-8669; telephone 916-757-8742.

Consumer's Guide - A cord is 128 cubic feet of wood stacked tightly, parallel and touching, for example, a stack that's 4 feet high, 4 feet deep, and 8 feet wide.

Organic - The organic food industry is showing yet another sign of working more closely, together with the formation of an organization called the Independent Organic Inspectors (IOI) on September 5, 1991. For more information, contact: Jim Riddle, Chair, IOI, 559 W. Main Street, Wilmington, OH 45177; telephone 513-382-2200 or 507-454-8310.

Teachers - "Schoolyard Garden Design," written for teachers in urban elementary schools, is a school gardening guide that costs \$10 (Check payable to Rural Urban Garden Program). Contact: Alison Clarke, Rural Urban Garden Program, 243 Rosedale Street, Rochester, NY 14607; telephone 706-271-4007.

By the Numbers - Always, use jumper cables correctly, whenever you must use them.

1. Connect the positive (+) cable to the positive post of the discharged battery.
2. Connect the other end of this cable to the positive post of the good battery.
3. Connect the negative (-) cable to the negative post of the good battery.
4. Make the final connection on the engine block or frame away from the battery.
5. Start vehicles and remove cables in reverse order.

Caution - Wear eye protection when using jumper cables. Explosion can cause injury or blindness.

Tip - Your opportunity is limited only by your imagination and ingenuity.

Cattle - A software program called SPA, for Standardized Performance Analysis, lets cattle producers analyze what they're doing and adjust for more total profit. For more information, contact: Jim McGrann, Extension Service, Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-2124; telephone 409-845-8012.

Food Costs - The farmer's share of farm to retail 1990 market basket food prices paid by consumers averaged 30 percent, unchanged in the last 4 years. However, how much or how little of the consumer's grocery dollar winds up in the farmer's pocket is dictated by the commodity or product produced. Contact: Denis F. Dunham, USDA-Economic Research Service-CED, Room 1137, 1301 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington DC 20005-4788; telephone 202-219-0870.

Tip - Fields need maintenance just like farm equipment. Investing a few dollars now in a soil test can save you even more dollars next year.

Guide - People who grow fruit on an acre or less will be interested in "Small-Scale Fruit Production." The cost is \$7.50. To obtain a copy, contact: Publications Distribution Center, The Pennsylvania State University, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802; telephone 814-865-6713.

Answer - Cooking oil.

Comeback - The heavy horse and mule industry appears to be gaining in popularity. A 1-year subscription (four issues) to The Draft Horse Journal, costs \$16. Contact: Maurice Telleen, The Draft Horse Journal, Dept. PG, P.O. Box 670, Waverly, IA 50677; telephone 319-352-4046.

Free Trade Agreement - "The tomato processing industry has expanded more rapidly in Mexico than the fresh tomato industry. Export of tomato paste to the United States has doubled since 1986 and will increase still further when the U.S. tariff is eliminated under the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). This will permit Mexico to displace other suppliers to the U.S. market (such as Chile, Turkey, and Taiwan). It will probably cause lower prices for U.S. producers as well." (California Agriculture, September-October 1991, p. 11)

Tip - Dry and crush shells from shellfish and sprinkle them on the soil, both to enrich it and to repel nematodes. Supplement with organic fertilizers.

Soil-Improving Humus - Cottonseed meal is a high-protein fraction of the process of extracting edible oil from cottonseed. It contains organic nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and numerous other elements. Know the secret of gardening with cottonseed meal by reading Beautiful Gardens with Cottonseed

Meal. Contact: National Cottonseed Products Association, P.O. Box 172267, Memphis, TN 38187; telephone 901-682-0800. Including 52 cents postage would be appreciated!

Tip - In the spring, before putting in your plants, put compost and peat in the rows to hold moisture in the sandy soil.

Trade - "The Soviet Union last year accounted for 6 percent of U.S. agricultural trade and 18 percent of U.S. corn exports. About 50 percent of U.S. wheat and 20-25 percent of corn is exported." (The Journal of Commerce, August 22, 1991, p. 6A)

Wetlands - "According to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service figures, more than half the wetlands that existed in colonial days have vanished from the lower 48 States. More than 200 million acres have dwindled to 99 million. And the Nature Conservancy estimates that 1,000 acres more are lost every day." (The New York Times Magazine, August 18, 1991, p. 21)

Did You Know - Adding salt to your food could subtract years from your life because salt sometimes contributes to high blood pressure, a condition that increases your risk of heart disease.

Wild Rice - "Questions about wild rice can be directed to two sources. Contact: Frank Bibeau, at the Minnesota Hand Harvested Wild Rice Association, telephone 218-246-8843, or a new hotline developed by the Minnesota Paddy Wild Rice Council: 800-235-8906." (The Washington Times, October 13, 1991, p. E1)

HERBS 91 - Proceedings of the 1991 International Herb Growers and Marketers Association (IHGMA) Conference are available from IHGMA, 1202 Allanson Road, Mundelein, IL 60060; telephone 708-566-4566. The resource book costs \$35.

Tip - Rainwater can carry the fertilizers and toxic chemicals you use on your yard into a river. By keeping rainwater in your yard, you improve water quality, reduce erosion, replenish the groundwater supply, and reduce the need for fertilizers.

Remember To Celebrate

The more than 20 million men and women who provide the food and fiber Americans use every day will be honored during National Agriculture Day (March 20, 1992) and National Women in Agriculture Day (March 19, 1992).

Both as farmers and consumers we have a responsibility to help the public understand the challenges the agricultural industry faces in continuing to meet and fulfill our food and fiber needs. Help celebrate by joining in the countless number of activities that will be held in conjunction with National Agricultural Week, March 15-21, 1992.

For information on National Agricultural Week, contact: Margaret Speich, Agriculture Council of America, 1250 "Eye"

Street, N.W., Suite 601, Washington, DC 20005; telephone 202-682-9200.

You Should Know

If you are contemplating a change in your agricultural business, always first develop written answers to the concerns and questions that come up; even the most minor ones. Remember - most alternative agricultural opportunities will require additional capital, labor, management skills, and marketing know-how. As a reminder, alternative agricultural opportunities can be grouped into six different categories. They are:

Alternative Product:

- New Crops
- Extensive and Intensive management of existing enterprises
- Forestry
- Aquaculture
- Livestock

Alternative Production Systems:

- Organic
- Low input
- Hydroponics

Alternative Markets:

- Cooperative development of resources
- New uses for existing crops
- New markets
- Processing/value added

Farm-Based Business:

- Alternative uses for farm based skills
- Alternative uses of farm facilities

Alternative Land Use:

- Recreational and tourism
- Land development
- Alternative Farm Ownership and Transfer

Opportunities:

- Land trusts
- Community-supported agriculture Cooperative

Please Circulate

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 13-14, 1992 - 1992 Illinois Specialty Growers and Trade Show, Pheasant Run Resort and Convention Center, St. Charles, IL. Contact: Lowell Lenschow, 1701 Towanda Avenue, Bloomington, IL 61702-2901; telephone 309-557-2107.

January 22-23, 1992 - Organic '92 Ecological Farming Conference, Asilomar Conference Center, Monterey, CA. Contact: Shirley Humphrey, Small Farm Center, University of California, Davis, CA 95616; telephone 916-757-8910.

January 27-29, 1992 - Annual New York State Vegetable Conference and Direct Marketing Conference for 1992, Rochester Convention Center, Rochester NY. Contact: Jean Warholc, P.O. Box 356, Ithaca, NY 14851-0356; telephone 607-539-7648.

January 30 - February 1, 1992 - 7th National Farmers' Direct Marketing Association 1992 Annual Conference, St. Paul Radisson Hotel, St. Paul, MN. Contact: Joan Sigmundik, Minnesota Extension Service, Ramsey County Extension Office, 2020 White Bear Ave., St. Paul, MN 55109; telephone 612-777-8156.

February 7-9, 1992 - California Farm Conference '92, California Department of Agriculture, Santa Rosa, CA. Contact: Carl DeWing, CDFA, 1220 N. St., Sacramento, CA 95814; telephone 916-445-8614.

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Washington, D.C. 20250-2200

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February 9-12, 1992 - North American Strawberry Growers Association, Colonial Williamsburg Lodge, Williamsburg, VA. Contact: Ed and Betty Burns, NASGA Membership/Meeting, P.O. Box 1245, Tarpon Springs, FL 34688; telephone 813-937-4109.

February 11-12, 1991 - 100th Annual Farmers Conference, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee Institute, AL. Contact: Juanita McBride, TU Cooperative Extension Program, Farm Mechanization Bldg., Rm. 209, Tuskegee Institute, AL 36088; telephone 205-727-8808.

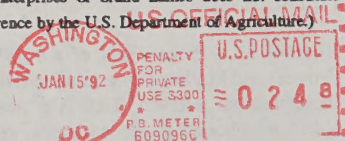
February 13, 1992 - 3rd Annual Future Trends In Animal Agriculture Conference, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Beltsville, MD. Contact: David Brubaker, PennAg Industries, P.O. Box 329, Ephrata, PA 17522; telephone

February 21, 1992 - Urban Tree Conference, Agriculture Center Auditorium, Sanford, FL. Contact: Uday K. Yadav, University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service, 250 West County Road, Sanford, FL 32773; telephone 407-323-2500, Ext. 5559.

February 24-25, 1992 - North America Dairy Grazing Conference, Chula Vista Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI. Contact: Louise Shivers, P.O. Box 9607, Jackson, MS 39286; telephone 800-748-9808.

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